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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect classroom space had on teacher behavior. It was hypothesized that Head Start teachers in classrooms with inadequate space (less than 30 square feet per child) would exhibit more controlling behavior toward children than would Head Start teachers in classrooms with an adequate amount of space per child (over 49 square feet per child). Twenty Head Start teachers from the U.S. Virgin Islands, most of them Black, English-speaking high school graduates, were observed during 50 minutes of free play, 20 minutes of group activity and 20 minutes of routines (washing, toileting, meals). The Control Non-Control Scale of the Flanders Interaction Analysis was used in modified form to code verbal and non-verbal teacher controlling behaviors. The hypothesis was confirmed. Teachers in classrooms with inadequate space are more controlling than teachers with adequate space. Provision of space is a basic tool in helping teachers become more effective. (KS)

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Cross-Cultural Study on the Effect of Space Teacher Controlling Behavior.

Gail Perry

SUMMARY

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The purpose of this study was to determine the effect classroom space had on teacher behavior. Educators, psychologists, ecologists and architects have said that human behavior is shaped and influenced by space and spatial settings. Overcrowding, which reduces the amount of space per person, is felt to have bad, if not disastrous effects on a population and has long been the concern of schools and subject to much research. More specifically, this researcher hypothesized that Head Start teachers in classrooms with inadequate space (less than 30 square feet per child) would exhibit more controlling behavior toward children than Head Start teachers in classrooms with an adequate amount of space per child (over 49 square feet per child).

Twenty Head Start teachers from the U.S. Virgin Islands were used for the study, the majority of whom were Black, English-speaking and High School graduates. The usable (available) space in the classrooms was determined by measuring the square footage of the room and subtracting the equipment and furniture from the total area. Teachers in the ten largest and ten smallest classrooms were selected, with the classrooms with inadequate space ranging from 9-12 square feet per child and the classrooms with adequate space ranging from 33 square feet - 73 square feet per child. All teachers were observed for three periods -- 50 minutes of free play, 20 minutes of group activity and 20 minutes of routines (washing, toileting, meals) with observers using a modification of Flanders Interaction Analysis -- the Control/Non-Control Scale. This scale was designed to measure teacher behavior on a 10 category continuum from non-controlling to excessive control or domination and included

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non-verbal as well as verbal preschool teacher behaviors. Teacher controlling behavior included teachers' activity towards children that tends to impose teacher goals or desires on children. This behavior included guiding, suggesting, directing, restricting, conducting group activities or disciplining. At the extreme end of the scale, controlling behavior approaches Anderson's dominative techniques of force, commands, threats, shame, blame or attacks against the personal status of an individual.

Data was collected by two different experimenters who had pretraining experience in using the Control/Non-Control Scale. Inter-rater reliability of the two experimenters was obtained by observation of three Head Start teachers prior to the actual collection of data. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87 using Scotts Method.

The data was analyzed by use of a one way analysis of variance with classroom size as the independent variable and percentage of teacher controlling behavior as the dependent variable. The F. ratio with 1, 18 degrees of freedom was 52.5037 which was significant. The mean % of controlling behavior was 16.2% and 46.7% for teachers in classrooms with adequate and inadequate space respectively. Thus the hypothesis that teachers in classrooms with inadequate space are more controlling than teachers in classrooms with adequate space was supported. The Virgin Island teachers use controlling interactions 31% of the time, non-controlling interactions 34% of the time and the 35% of the time was spent in unrelated activity. All teachers used significantly more controlling behavior in group activities than in free play. The mean of teacher controlling behavior was 49.08% in group activities and 26.39% in free play, with a significant

F-ratio of 10.9598. Restricting child's activity, discipline and threats such as "Behave yourself or you won't go to the library." (categories 8 and 9) was practiced more frequently in the classrooms with inadequate space. The mean of teacher controlling behavior of 3.11 and 1.85 and a significant F-ratio 9.61.

The major conclusion of this study was that Virgin Island high school teachers in classrooms with inadequate space are more controlling than teachers with adequate space. In eight small classrooms out of ten, free play consisted of children playing with manipulative toys at the table. Whereas in all of the large classrooms, free play involved more movement -- use of wheel toys, large blocks, active doll corner play, and physical games among the children. Therefore, as might be expected, physical restrictions as well as the verbal and non-verbal controls in the scale were placed on the children in the small classrooms even though equipment was the same. This had the effects of alterning the nature of the program.

One of the continuing and pressing questions in education from preschool to college is how can we help teachers become more effective. Increasing costs have forced administrators even more than ever to set priorities in selecting the kinds of tools that teachers need. Space is decidedly one of these tools. The data supports strongly the hypothesis that behavior exemplified by teachers who lack adequate space tends to be more controlling and dominant than non-controlling. Space may be one of the few variables affecting teachers that supervisors and educational planners can definitely control. The Control/Non-control Scale modified for the purpose of this research proved to be useful instrument for analyzing the behavior of Head Start teachers.